DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 767 FL 801 184

AUTHOR Janes, Helena; Kermani, Hengameh
TITLE Seriedad y Broma (Formality and Teasing): Vertical and Horizontal Scaffolding of Literacy Events in Latino Immigrant Families.
PUB DATE 1997-03-00
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Family Environment; *Family Influence; Family Programs; *Immigrants; *Latin Americans; Literacy; *Literacy Education; Low Income; *Parent Participation; Siblings
IDENTIFIERS *Latinos

ABSTRACT

A study examined the home literacy practices of 180 low-income Latino recent-immigrant families participating in a 3-year family literacy program. Data were gathered from videotapes of literacy interactions between parents and children using children's literacy materials, audiotapes of naturally occurring conversation among family members, transcriptions of tapes segmented into teaching units and coded for a range of scaffolding strategies and responses, family information questionnaires and screening surveys, tutors' weekly written reports on family visits, and program coordinators' field notes on home-visit observations. Analysis indicates that family literacy events did not occur and are not scaffolded in the same manner in this community as in middle class families, but are likely to happen in a variety of time frames and locations, routinized in culturally specific ways. Authentic literacy practices do occur, and literacy scaffolding centrally involves parents' one-way transmission of "the right way" for an educated child to behave. Literacy scaffolding is as likely to occur between siblings as between adults and children. Ten methods for the program to support family literacy more effectively are outlined. Contains 20 references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Helena A. Janes
Hengameh Kermani
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 410 767

SERIEDAD Y BROMA (FORMALITY AND TEASING): VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL SCAFFOLDING OF LITERACY EVENTS IN LATINO IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Helena Janes, Ph.D., CSU Stanislaus, California
and Hengameh Kermani, Ph.D., UNC, ~~North Carolina~~ wilmington

BACKGROUND: Literacy training or literacy support?

Parent involvement in children's literacy education has long been accepted as a central element in effective schooling (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Schneider and Coleman, 1993). Scribner and Cole (1981) describe literacy as social practice in which learners are apprenticed into group membership (cf. Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Rogoff, 1990). Can such apprenticeship be successfully initiated for children by schools in cases where parents' literacy experiences are different from those the schools advocate? Or does this kind of initiation cut children off from their parents in sometimes tragic ways, as Wong-Fillmore has convincingly argued? "If literacy is culture, then intervening with or 'tampering' with literacy....is to change, sometimes forcibly, the way people live" (Wagner, 1991:17). As argued by such researchers, the imposition of an autonomous model of literacy (cf. Gallimore & Goldenberg, 1993), in which literacy is seen as separate from culture, may be a significant part of the reason so many literacy campaigns fail.

Recent literature on intergenerational literacy programs includes a surprising number of negative program evaluations: critics complain of programs that "train or "coerce" parents in how to read to their children (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988); of programs that "blame the victim", that imply that homes have "no literacy", and that perpetuate the "we know, you don't know" dichotomy (Shockley, 1995). White, Taylor & Moss's 1992 review of parent-involvement programs is devastatingly negative: the authors conclude that programs aimed at newly increasing numbers of immigrant preschoolers and their parents must aim to involve supplementary parent education, careful selection of materials, and different ways for telling stories, teaching, speaking and thinking. A recent meta-analysis (Bus, van IJzendoorn & Pellegrini,1995) comparing 29 studies on intergenerational transmission of literacy, does not support literacy enhancement through book reading unconditionally: the authors suggest that if the reading situation is unpleasant and the interaction

FL 801 184

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ineffective, insistence on book reading without attention to family literacy habits is likely to be counterproductive.

The present study contributes to the above research by examining home literacy practices of 180 low-income Latino recent-immigrant families participating in a three-year Family Literacy Program run by the UCSB Educational Psychology and Preprofessional Program. Evidence drawn from the cumulative three-year data collection of videotapes and audiotapes, questionnaires and surveys, tutors' reports and coordinators' field notes of home visits indicates that in general the use of books and literacy materials in homes differed considerably from mainstream literacy practices. Borrowing "mainstream" definitions from Heath's (1983) exemplary home literacy practice rubrics, and following Moll and Gonzalez' (1994) household research model, this investigation presents a step-by-step descriptive summary of participant families' "prototypical" literacy events (cf. Panofsky, 1987).

METHOD: The UCSB Family Literacy Tutorial Project

Population

180 immigrant Latino families with children in state-funded preschools participated in a federally-funded Family Literacy Tutorial Project designed to assist parents scaffold their children's early experiences with literacy. Over 60 participating tutors were trained over the three year period in a UCSB Educational Psychology seminar to assist in storybook reading with families. Most participating parents were recent immigrants from rural areas of southern Mexico and Central America working in service and agricultural employment. The average length of residence in the U.S. was 6 years and the average level of education of parents was 5th grade. All families spoke Spanish in the home. The average number of children per family was three. The average number of children's books per family prior to enrollment in the program was reported by parents as 0 - 5.

Data collection

Data collected over the three-year period included:

1) videotapes of literacy interactions between parents and children using children's literacy materials;
2) audiotapes of naturally occurring conversation among family members;
3) transcriptions of tapes segmented into teaching units and coded for a range of scaffolding strategies and responses;

4) family information questionnaires and screening surveys;
5) tutor's weekly written reports on family visits;
6) program coordinators' field notes on home-visit observations.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: Prototypical family literacy events

[Note: salient features adapted from Panofsky's "prototypical middle-class bookreading event" are presented in bold typeface for purposes of comparison..]

1. Literacy events with children are a recurrent, predictable activity involving books.

Questionnaires and tutors' reports show that in Literacy Project families reading did not occur regularly or predictably between parents and children, in terms either of times of day or of numbers of times per week. Reading definitely did occur, however. Reading was observed in home visits and tutorial sessions to be an event that primarily occurred between siblings with others present; it was initiated in an ad hoc and negotiated manner; it usually concerned practical information exchange. Families were unused to owning, buying, or borrowing books: a prospective book purchase often involved family discussion. Texts were far more likely to be something other than books, for example, informational pamphlets, newspapers, calendars, letters, bills, sale advertisements, official forms, homework workbooks.

2. Literacy events with children involve script-like, routinized activity.

Almost all Literacy Project parents reported that they worked at seasonal service or agricultural jobs: long shift hours and generally cramped, impermanent home situations did not foster bedtime or other reading routines. Additionally, behavioral scripts for children's book reading were unfamiliar to most participants: no parent in this program reported that he or she had been read to as a child. However, other routinized events which were language-based, though not reported as significant in the formal questionnaires on home literacy practices, were reported by tutors and coordinators in home observations. Such familiar routines included: choral singing to the guitar; prayers at table and at bedtime; catechism practice; familiar and unfamiliar *adivinanzas* and *pistas* (riddles and hints); repeated, familiar, formulaic *chistes* (jokes); and repeated, familiar, anecdotal family stories *(cuentos)*.

3. Literacy events with children are part of clearly demarcated "event-chains".

Literary Project parents, according to tutors' and coordinators' reports, tended not to demarcate individual time for literacy events with their children. However, routinized and familiar literacy rituals regularly occurred: tutors who spent evenings and mealtimes with their families reported extensive and ongoing communal interaction in the form of dialogues and exchanges. Examples given were: group pauses for ritualistic story-telling (even for stories told the day before); conversational *casos* (cautionary tales); jokes; sibling kidding *(bromas)*; commentaries on T.V. programs (the T.V. set was usually not turned off in homes during tutors' visits though the volume was often turned down), especially the *novelas* (soap operas); ongoing performance of homework even during meals; practical, religious or art-related projects involving literacy, such as composing or discussing altar-displays, photo-mementos, home-made birthday or greeting cards for family *convivencias* (get-togethers), or letters to and from the home *pueblo*. Literacy scripts or event-chains typically involved playful or competitive collaboration over homework or other literacy tasks between younger family members in the form of challenging, joking and teasing *(bromas)*. Sometimes such bromas seemed *de mal gusto* (mean) to observers, for example: "How come you 'don't know'? Are you stupid or what?" *("¿Cómo que 'no sabes?' ¿Eres idiota o qué?",*) "Hey hey, look at that, he doesn't know" *("Eh, eh, 'ira, 'ira, no sabe, no sabe"),* "Well, I just told you, you don't know anything!" *("Pues, ya te dijé, tu no sabes nada").* Nonetheless, children were regularly encouraged by parents to put up with such chiding *(¡aguántate !)* , and not make a fuss *(no hagas muina)*, nor cry over trifles *(no llores por una tontería)*.

4. Literacy events with children take place in a designated and non-random location.

Literacy Project families did not seek or designate individual spaces for personal communication. Apart from the constraints of the living situation, deliberate segregation other than by age or gender at *convivencias* (get-togethers) appeared to be considered anti-social. Tutors' efforts to isolate a parent in a private space with a preschool-age child for purposes of literacy tutoring usually failed. All household space was available to all family members. For example, families typically accommodated each other by mutual agreement at table by eating in shifts, or used others' beds as sofas. Additionally, most beds were shared at night by several

people, making bedtime stories a possible disturbance to others: children were regularly cautioned not to disturb sleeping adults. Reading interactions sometimes occurred at the table after *cena* (dinner) or *comida* (lunch), when families sometimes shared a period of relaxation. At those times, children were seen to bring books to the table, usually to older siblings, and sit on their laps to listen to stories, while others were coming and going, and joining in or listening.

5. Literacy events with children have a "guarded boundary".

Reading interactions were not apparently accorded any particular prioritized status. Videotapes of tutorial sessions in homes and tutors' reports indicate frequent interruptions of literacy events by family crises and even everyday occurrences such as the arrival of a husband from work, requests by family members for food or drink, telephone calls, or visits. Tutors who worked on weekends sometimes had to wait in line for time with the family after visits from members of proselytizing religious sects, or merchandise demonstrators.

However, reading sessions, both those that were videotaped and those that were not, were universally marked with a different kind of "guarded boundary". *Seriedad* (formality) was the primary characteristic of parents' reading style and delivery. Without exception across the sample parents took seriously the task of transmitting the high significance and gravity of the literacy interaction. Reflecting this sense of seriousness, despite interruptions and distractions, videotapes show many preschool children in the program to possess a remarkable ability to pay selective attention to literacy materials and procedures. They were able to resume attentiveness after distractions without losing their focus.

Furthermore, parents usually assumed and maintained ownership of the book itself, and of reading and interpreting the text. Mothers' laps were usually occupied by younger children so that the normal reading position was side-by-side with the book in front of the parent. Some parents actually denied children physical access to the book so that they had to crane to see the pictures. In keeping with parents' seriousness concerning the literacy event, however, children showed a consistently high tolerance of frustration and typically a silent, immobile fascination with pictures or text.

6. Reading with children is an activity which children initiate by selecting and bringing books to adults and maintain by negotiating.

Children served by the Literacy Project had very few books to select from, and access to these was often disputed by other children. Some children secreted books donated by the Literacy Project under mattresses to keep them private. Children were sometimes observed pretend-reading to themselves or to or with similar age siblings rather than asking to be read to. Generally it was the parent not the child who was seen to initiate the reading activity. During the reading interaction, parents were also heard to speak far more than the children, whose apparent role was to sit still, listen and observe (*"¡Siéntate bien, pórtate bien!"*), and learn *"lo correcto"* ("the right way"). Parents would often end the session ritualistically and without negotiation with the closure routine *"Colorín colorado, este cuento se ha acabado"* ("This story is over.") Parents were usually observed to end the session by putting books away, or telling children to put them away (*"¡ya guárdalo!"*) rather than giving them to their children for further scrutiny, review or rereading.

DISCUSSION: *Seriedad y broma*

In sum, family literacy in this participant community is likely to happen in a variety of time frames and locations. It is routinized in culturally specific ways. Literacy events often involve audience-oriented performed oral routines, and may have practical, artistic or religious significance in participants' lives. Literacy events are often unmarked by boundaries and "unguarded" from other activities. Siblings are as likely as parents to scaffold literacy engagement for children, and often their scaffolding is characterized by teasing, nickname-calling, or competitive, challenging prompts. Parent-child literacy interactions are marked by *seriedad*, and are typically initiated, conducted, negotiated and terminated by the parent.

Thus on all counts that mark reading with children as a script or event chain carrying priority in middle class families such as those studied by Panofsky, the experience of Literacy Project families was shown to be different. Bearing in mind the cautions quoted above concerning "tampering", "coercing", and "imposing autonomous literacy models", it is illuminating, particularly for researchers and literacy mentors raised in mainstream Western middle class literacy traditions, to spend time examining and comprehending these differences. Once literacy mentors begin to spend time with families in their homes, the differences can easily be seen as authentic literacy practices in their own right rather than deficiencies to be compensated for or programmatically fixed. It becomes self-evident that such

differences serve specific socialization purposes, and the socialization patterning which these literacy practices reflect can be understood and appreciated. Consequently, rather than focus on features which this patterning lacks, literacy mentors can acknowledge, use and adapt them to prepare families for school-based learning. For example, constructivist approaches designed to facilitate children's individual and personal engagement with text may be unfamiliar and confusing to children raised in households where adult modeling and *seriedad* is the usual way to introduce books. Educators can achieve higher levels of understanding by presenting emergent literacy materials and procedures to immigrant children in culturally familiar styles.

Literacy scaffolding for these immigrant families centrally involves parents' one-way transmission of "the right way" for a *niño educado* to behave, in literacy as in life. *Ser bien educado* (Galindo and Olguín, 1996) includes *respeto* for elders, observation, listening, reflection, and imitation. Harwood, Miller and Lucca Izarry (1993), studying Puerto Rican mothers, call this the Proper Demeanor parent attitude - *respetuoso, tranquilo* and *amable* (respectful, quiet and pleasant) (cf. Chao, 1996; Miller, 1988). Such authoritative scaffolding can be, but is not ipso facto authoritarian. Parents frequently show high levels of sensitivity to children's understanding. In some communities in rural areas of Southern Mexico, which were well represented in our sample, North American interactional patterns which utilize repeated questioning and elicitation recasts are held to be intrusive: adults are accustomed to find other, more subtle ways to ascertain or ensure children's learning. Parents unobtrusively listen and observe, then quietly model or demonstrate language patterns they note are unfamiliar to their children.

Literacy scaffolding in the participant community is as likely to happen between siblings as between adults and children, because of issues of daily living indicated above. Such peer input scaffolds a complementary form of literacy construction, more horizontal than vertical. Researchers have recently been focusing increasingly on the affective and play-like elements of peer scaffolding and the contribution which humor and verbal play make to children's communicative effectiveness and social competence (McGhee, 1988; Moss, 1992; Crystal, 1996; Ely and McCabe, 1994). For participants in this literacy project, such *bromas* stimulated the acquisition of new forms of literacy through a complex of natural processes of language sharing, borrowing, and humorous challenging.

CONCLUSION: Some ways to support family literacy

On the basis of observations and findings from the accumulated data, Literacy Project personnel were able to make specific recommendations for future program implementation which resulted in increasingly positive outcomes. Third year drop-out rates were dramatically reduced (by 90%), and the program expanded rapidly with word-of-mouth recruitment, high unsolicited enrollment and enthusiastic participant involvement. In light of the successful outcomes which this project achieved in the community it served, the following recommendations are offered for consideration as effective and appropriate methods of enhancing literacy programs of similar scope, function and design.

1) supplementary parent group sessions on family literacy, including discussions of parents' own literacy practices and educational background;
2) targeted recruitment of native language or culturally similar tutors;
3) enhanced sensitivity-training for tutors including analysis of video and audiotapes of family literacy patterns;
4) improved opportunities for tutors to observe and consult with professionals familiar with immigrant groups from rural areas;
5) open inclusion and encouragement of sibling participation and inclusion of sibling informal scaffolding strategies by tutors;
6) use of more acculturated parents as liaisons or cultural interpreters for new participants;
7) increased flexibility in tutorial session location, duration, length of contact between family and tutor, and procedures;
8) introduction of a wider range of literacy materials including those created by or valued by families themselves;
9) modification of scaffolding benchmarks initially mandated by the program;
10) acknowledgment and more comprehensive use of existing family patterns of literacy transmission, both formal and informal.

REFERENCES

Bus, A. G. & van IJzendoorn, M. H, (1988). Mother-child interactions, attachment, and emergent literacy: A cross-sectional study. Child Development, 59 (5), 1262 - 1272.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1990). Literacy for empowerment: The role of parents in children's education. Bristol: Falmer Press.

Chao, R. (1996). Chinese and European American mothers beliefs about the role of parenting in cultivating school success. Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology, Vol. 27, no. 4.

Crystal, D. (1996). Language play and linguistic intervention. Child Language Teaching and Therapy. Vol. 12, no. 3.

Ely, R. & McCabe, A. (1994). Riddles and reading ability: Language play of Kindergarten children. First Language, 14, 19 - 35.

Galindo, R. & Olguín, M. (1996). Reclaiming bilingual educators' cultural resources. Urban Education, Vol. 31, no. 1.

Gallimore, R. & Goldenberg, C. (1993) Activity settings of early literacy: Home and school factors in children's emergent literacy. In E. A. Forman, N. Minick, & C.A. Stone (Eds.), Contexts for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in children's development (pps. 315 - 355). New York: OUP.

Harwood, R., Schoelmeich, A., Ventura-Cook, E., Schultze, P. & Wilson, S. (1996). Cultural and class influences on Anglo and Puerto Rican mothers beliefs regarding long-term social goals and child behavior. Child Development, Vol. 67, 2446 - 2461.

Heath, S. B. (1983). Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McGhee, M. (1988). The contribution of humor to children's social development. Journal of the Child in Contemporary Society, 20, 119-134.

Moss, E. (1992). Socio-affective context of joint cognitive activity. In L. T. Winegar & J. Valsiner (Eds.) Children's development within social context (Vol. 2, 117 - 154). NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Panofsky, C.P. (1987). The interactive roots of literacy: Parent-child book reading and the process of cognitive socialization. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, UNM, Albuquerque.

Rogoff, B. (1990). Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context. New York: Oxford University Press.

Schneider, B. & Coleman, J.S. (1993). Parents, their children, and schools. Boulder: Westview Press.

Scribner, S. & Cole, M. (1981). The psychology of literacy. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Shockley. B. (1994). Extending the learning community: Home-to-school and school-to-home. The Reading Teacher, 47, 500 - 502.

Taylor, D. and Dorsey-Gaines, E. (1988). Growing up literate: Learning from inner-city families. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Wagner, D. A. (1994). Literacy, culture and development: Becoming literate in Morocco. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

White, K. R., Taylor, M. J., & Moss, V. D. (1992). Review of parent-involvement programs. Review of Educational Research, 62 (1), 91 - 127.

Wong-Fillmore, L. (1985). Final report for learning English through bilingual instruction/Submitted to N.I.E. Berkeley: University of California Press.